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**Heavenward.
From 'Heaven
opened'.**







HEAVENWARD.

FROM

"Heaven Opened."

BY

REV. FATHER COLLINS.



London:
THOMAS RICHARDSON & SON,
AND DERBY.
1881.



INTRODUCTION.

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THIS little book, "HEAVENWARD," is a small portion of a larger work entitled "*Heaven Opened.*" Those who find pleasure or profit in the reading of the smaller will do well to go on to the perusal of the greater.

Fenelon held that those who have reached the highest state of perfection are quite indifferent to their own felicity;—that they desire heavenly bliss for themselves in no other sense than that in which they desire it for others,—and that the one reason for this desire is their wish that God's glory may be promoted. This doctrine was condemned by the Holy See. The language of the Saints, therefore, which might appear to bear this meaning, must be understood only in an orthodox sense, in the spirit in which it was uttered.

The soul, therefore, in seeking God, seeks also heaven, seeks also her own happiness. God has been pleased to join these two things indissolubly together. According to the language of the Canticles, she runs after Him, but it is to the odour of His ointments, "*We will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments.*" "Ointment and perfume," says Solomon, (Prov. xxvii.) "rejoice the heart." The joys of heaven are the "ointments" of the great Bridegroom of the soul. The odour of them at a distance fills her even now with gladness, and from their complete fruition she one day expects the fulness of joy at God's right hand.

But some may think that to be thinking of the joys of heaven is to serve God from mercenary motives. This is a mistake. To serve God for the sake of

worldly success, for prosperity, health, or wealth, is to serve Him for hire, and is mercenary, because such gifts are separable from His love and favour, and He gives them sometimes to His worst enemies. But the joys of heaven He gives only to friends. They are the tokens of His highest love and favour.

There is no imperfection therefore in making the hope of heavenly reward the motive for our good actions. S. Peter, in the person of the perfect, cries out : "*Behold I we have left all, and have followed Thee, what shall we therefore have ?*" And our Lord does not reply, Be content simply to know that it is for My greater glory ; but He answers : "*You shall receive a hundred fold in this life, and in the world to come life eternal.*" It is the perfect, again, that our Lord instructs, in the Sermon on the Mount, to rejoice at persecution, *because great is your reward in heaven.* Indeed, it is said of our Lord Himself that, *joy being set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down for ever on the right hand of God.*

It was not, therefore, the ancient patriarchs only that served God for the recompense of the reward, nor the imperfect of the Gospel Dispensation, but the perfect too. The possession of God, and of beatitude, are inseparable ideas to our mind. In desiring the one we desire the other, for love sighs after the happiness of union with the object of its love. We may then, without fear, set before ourselves the enjoyment of our crown, knowing that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things God hath prepared for them that love Him.

HEAVENWARD.

CHAPTER I.

MAN CREATED FOR HEAVEN.

WHEN God created man, says S. Austin, He created him for happiness. He placed him, at his creation, in a garden of pleasure, a garden planted by His own hand, full of delights. Oh how bright was man's first experience of life in that paradise of bliss. Adam had not many co-partners of his paradise. Man does not require many companions for his happiness. The society of but one to whom he can pour out his whole soul is enough for him. To Adam this one was Eve, a helper like himself : like him, yet not like him ; like him in nature, in beauty, and sentiments ; but still a fairer, softer reflection of himself ; alike, but with

just the difference that made their society so delectable to each other. Adam's happiness was not a mere earthly happiness; though of that he had more than we can conceive, with no cares, or sorrows, or trials, nothing but pure bliss. But his greatest joy was his communion with God. Everything led him up to God. In everything he saw God, the print of God's finger, His power, His wisdom, and His love. He rested not in the creature, but went beyond, contemplating in all things the Creator. He loved God, and felt also that God loved him. It was no doubtful feeling, but a sure unhesitating certainty. Sin had not then formed that cloud which now obscures God from the soul.

Yet Adam was not quite content, though so much, so very much, had been made over to him. He had not the full command over creation. One fruit was withheld from him. It was but one tree, yet the restric-

tion limited him. His knowledge was immense, so that he knew the virtues and qualities of each created thing, and gave to each its fitting name. Still his knowledge had a bound. He was not like God, knowing good and evil. And his communion with God, though filling him every moment with extatic delight, yet had not the fulness of joy of clear open vision. In no way was Adam's happiness complete, great though it was. It was but the earthly paradise: it was not heaven. God created man for heaven, and nothing short of heaven will fully satisfy him. Heaven is an unmeasured, unlimited happiness. It is the full possession of all that is desirable, the possession of the Infinite.

2. God has created us for heaven. Some are born in this world to a splendid destiny. But there is no destiny so grand as the being born for heaven. Of all the grand positions on earth, none is comparable

with the being a Saint of God, and equal to the Angels. For there none are little: all the just shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Each one there may sing with David: "The lines are fallen to me in goodly places; for my inheritance is excellent to me." On earth the prizes are few and the blanks are many; but heaven is a city of princes, where all are noble and of high rank. To all is given royal apparel and a beautiful crown.

It is observable of Abraham, that to the children of his concubines he gave certain gifts, and so sent them away; but to Isaac he reserved the inheritance: so does God give even to reprobate persons the grandeurs of this world, but He reserves the inheritance of heaven for His favourite and elect children. The grandeurs of this world do not necessarily confer happiness. A golden crown will not cure an aching heart. King Antigonus one

day, turning his diadem in his fingers, said, if people knew how much care was under it, they would not be so eager to put it on. And Henry VII., in all his halls and public buildings set up in the windows the device of a crown upon thorns. The grandeurs of heaven alone confer happiness without mixture of pain, and the very least of its joys is above our comprehension. The eye may pierce afar off and reach even to the stars of heaven, but eye hath not seen those joys. The ear may gather in the description of the grandest and most glorious things; yet our ears have never heard anything like those joys. The understanding of man can unravel the most subtle problems, but it cannot reach so high, so deep, as to comprehend those joys, for they are greater than the heart of man can conceive.

Saint Augustine used to say that he had three wishes : first, that he

might have seen Christ in the flesh; secondly, to have heard S. Paul preach; and thirdly, to have seen Rome in the days of its glory. But, after all, these are small matters to those which the Saints in glory now behold. They see Christ, not now in the form a servant, but Christ as a King in majesty and splendour; not Paul preaching in weakness and contempt, but Paul rejoicing and triumphant; not the perishing beauty of pagan Rome, but the glorious beauty of the New Jerusalem, that city whose maker and builder is God.

3. It is on this account that the Apocalypse of Saint John is so valuable, so precious a book to us, because it reveals heaven to us. Of all the books of the New Testament the loss of this one would be, on some accounts, the most irreparable. It is the only book of its kind, and its loss could not be supplied. If one of the Gospels

had been lost the other three would, in great measure, make up the deficiency. If an Apostolic Epistle had been lost the rest might have sufficed. But the loss of the Apocalypse would have left a blank nothing could fill, because no other book of Scripture has the like contents. This book is like a new revelation to us. It ushers us into a new land, a new world. It opens heaven to us. In other books we are told of heaven, we are instructed how to gain heaven; but here heaven is shown to us. We enter on its scenes. It is not the Saints in conflict any more, but the Saints in triumph, in possession of their crowns, victorious, reigning with Christ.

The Gospels, although they promise heaven, only portray the state of suffering. They speak of taking up the cross, of being hated of all men, of being persecuted from city to city. The Acts of the

Apostles and the Epistles continue the picture, with vivid details of sufferings actually undergone by the followers of the Crucified. But in the Apocalypse all is changed from tribulation into happiness. Already they taste of the divine banquet. Already they are seated on their thrones. Already they chant the hymn of the victory of the Lamb slain, and behold the judgments of God poured forth upon their enemies. The whole book of the Apocalypse is a series of victories and jubilations, a diorama unfolded of splendid scenes of triumph.

In the records of the ancient dispensation, in the book of Isaias and Ezekiel, we have certain descriptions of heaven, but man forms no feature in them. In the visions, however, of the Apocalypse, it is quite otherwise. In them we behold a new element. A new race is seen; strangers coming from another country to their new home. The

Angels around the throne fall back, that the new comers may take their places nearest to God's seat. Mankind are now in the first rank. The four living creatures before the throne no longer now symbolize the cherubim, but are symbols, as we learn from their canticle, of those "redeemed out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation." It is they now, and not the seraphs, who sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy," before the throne of God. The graces of the Gospel are the extension and individual application of the divine Incarnation to each of the faithful. For this reason many of the holy Fathers (see S. John Damascene *De Imaginibus*,) think that man is thereby exalted above the very highest of the heavenly hierarchies, not above the Angels only, but above the Cherubim and Seraphim. So our Lord revealed to S. Gertrude that He had exalted man above the Angels. (B. iii., ch. 8.)

No doubt one great object of this revelation was to put heaven so palpably before the eyes of the persecuted Christians of the first ages, as to strip death of its terrors, and make martyrdom desirable. What happened to Saint Stephen individually, when he looked up and saw heaven opened, was thus, in a symbolical manner, made over to the whole Church. But it was not for them only. To the end of time these scenes have the same ever living effect, stamping on the Christian mind the reality of the unseen world. The promises of the book are as fresh now as when first uttered. "*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection. In these the second death hath no power. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: for they rest from their labours, and their works follow them.*" After all, what is there worth striving for but heaven? To walk with

Christ in white, to sit on His throne, as He is set down on His Father's throne! All the rest will break up like a bubble; all the rest is spending our strength for that which is not bread, a wasted life, a missed vocation. This, then, shall be my task till death. For nothing, O my God, can content me but the pleasures of Thy house! Then only shall I be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear.

CHAPTER II.

OBLATION.

A TRAVELLER that wishes to make sure of reaching his journey's end chooses the safest road. The safest road to heaven is the way of perfection, and this is entered on by a full oblation of ourselves into the hands of God. A complete surrender of ourselves

into the hands of God is, in fact, an abridged perfection. If our life is cut short, we have no time to accomplish anything, yet in this one act we have, in a sort, all that would have proceeded from it, God counting the will for the deed. In eternity a vast tree of glory will be the result of this one grace, as the oak springs from the acorn.

But an act of Oblation sincerely made is a very martyrdom. Those who think it is easy have certainly never made it. Few people have the courage for it. If there were something definite to give, even although a difficult thing to surrender, one might nerve oneself more easily to the task. But in an act of Oblation everything is comprised, and one knows not what God will take, or what He may not do. We are completely at His mercy, and perhaps He will try us in the very sorest point, where it will most hurt us, as Job says : "*The fear*

that I feared hath come to me, and that which I was afraid of hath befallen me." The very thing we most shrink from, this may be just what God will require of us. If we were allowed one or two exceptions from our Oblation, we might make it then with tolerable ease: but an act of Oblation must have no exceptions, no reserves. It is an absolute, unconditional giving up of all, a surrender at discretion.

When our Lord became Incarnate, His first act, as man, was an act of Oblation. "*Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God.*" The hidden life at Nazareth, the three years Ministry, the Passion and Cross, were the simple outcome of this one act. God received by this act the entire disposal of our Lord's life, and we see how He used that power. He did not spare. God gave to His Son a chalice exceeding bitter, and He was not content till His Son had drunk of it to the

very dregs. This is what God did with the Son with whom He was well pleased. And not only was it costly to our Lord when, in general, He at the outset made the offering of Himself, but, as each item of the sacrifice was given, at each He felt a fresh keen pain. But He never withdrew the Oblation. Let nature shrink as she might, still was He firmly set to carry out all. "*The chalice,*" He says, "*which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?*"

When Saint Paul was converted, his first act was an Oblation of himself: "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*" and our Lord, accepting the Oblation, said: "*I will show him how great things he shall suffer for My Name's sake.*" All Saint Paul's after life was the outcome of that one oblation,—his labours and imprisonments, his journeyings and fastings, his prayers and his preachings, his stonings and his stripes,

—the whole tree sprang out of that root. And, when *we* make an act of Oblation, we must be prepared for all that may result from it,—all that God may possibly demand. We must be prepared for suffering of one sort or other. No cross, no crown. But how much suffering, or of what kind, is God's secret. It would not be good for us to know it. He will make all known in its own good time. It is enough for us at present to hear the words : "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now."

An act of Oblation, then, implies suffering. If it did not, it would be but a mere compliment, a high-flown sentiment, and nothing more, —*vox et præterea nihil*. It is this willingness to do and suffer things contrary to our natural inclinations, that constitutes what is called generosity with God. Strictly speaking, we cannot be generous with God, because all that we give

Him is properly His own already. We are indebted to Him for every breath we draw. We hang upon Him for each moment of our life. He has but to put forth His hand and cut the thread, and all is gone. We are absolutely and utterly dependent. But there are some things which God commands, others which He only counsels. When we are desirous to do, not only what He commands, but also what He counsels,—indeed His every wish,—then we make a true act of oblation.

God does not counsel every one to enter the religious state. Although the religious state is the best in itself, it is not the best for every person. We may follow the counsels of God for our perfection, and not enter religion. It is enough that we should be ready and willing to enter the religious state if God signified to us that that was His will for us. In the lives of the Fathers of the Desert,

it is related of S. Macarius that, being desirous, after many years of austerities, to know how far he had advanced in perfection, he received for answer that he was now equal in merit to two married ladies who lived in Alexandria. Having sought out these persons, he found that they had each lived for fifteen years with their husbands in perfect union and charity, without a word of dissension. The Abbot Paphnutius, also in the like case, received a revelation that his perfection equalled that of a certain great lord who, living in the world, let his lands at a reasonable rent, was hospitable to the poor, kind and peaceful, never grieving any one. These Saints were greatly consoled to find that perfection does not consist in austerities, but in the fulfilling gracefully the duties of that state of life to which God has given us a vocation.

This perfection can, however,

never be brought about without an entire surrender of ourselves into the hands of God. Those who wish to arrive at perfection in any art or accomplishment, such as music, painting, or sculpture, put themselves into the hands of some celebrated professor and doctor of the art. They do not trust their own natural taste or mode of execution, but they submit their taste and method to be formed under his guidance. They study in a school the works of the best masters, making their productions models for their own efforts to strain after, and thus, under the influences of high art, they rise to loftier conceptions, and a more finished execution. An apprentice who refused to be taught how to hold and work with the implements of his trade, would never make a skilful craftsman. So in God's school of virtue and holiness, the pupils must subject themselves entirely to His

direction. He is the chief Master of the school, and spiritual guides are the ushers or under-masters, who prepare the pupils for His teaching.

Our subjection to God in His school does not benefit Him, but ourselves. On the birthday of Socrates all his pupils brought him presents. When they had finished their offerings, there was left one poor young man, Æschines, who had presented nothing. Socrates said to him: "And what are you going to give, my son?" The young man answered: "Having nothing else to give, I give you myself." Socrates was pleased, and told the other pupils that Æschines had given him a costlier present than all the rest, because all that is outside of us is not so much as ourself. Then he told the young man that he would one day restore him his present, bettered and improved. So does God deal with us when we give Him our-

selves. In paradise He will restore us the present, bettered and improved.

We believe this, yet we are quite afraid to pass out of our own hands into His. To cease to belong to ourselves fills us with vain chimerical fears. Some people are for years and years bargaining with God for some trifle, and cannot make up their minds to make the full sacrifice. Uneasy in mind at their own infidelity, they are miserable, and, for fear of another misery, they dare not take the step that alone could make them happy.

An act of Oblation obliges us to three things: to *do or suffer* whatever God bids us do or suffer, and to *leave undone* whatever He bids us leave undone. Whatever our lawful superiors lawfully command us to *do or leave undone*, God also, *in our conscience*, at the same time, commands us to do or leave undone. In obeying,

we obey the inner voice of our own conscience, we obey God Himself, who commands there. We oblige ourselves also, by an act of Oblation, to obey all God's secret inspirations; to do or to leave undone anything we may lawfully do or leave undone, simply because He so inspires; as also to do or to leave undone something, that we may act with more perfection. In these inspirations, God's will is signified to us secretly in our own soul, but He never inspires us to go against our obligations, or to neglect obedience to our Superiors. We oblige ourselves, lastly, to suffer all pains, persecutions, and trials, brought on us wrongfully and even sinfully, without giving way to uneasiness, knowing that nothing can happen but by God's permission, and that all things work together for good to those that love Him.

If we have not yet given God the unreserved surrender of our hearts,

we should do it at once, that we may be His in deed and in truth.

O my God, I give myself to Thee this day. I am Thine, O my God, I am Thine. I make a complete surrender, I abandon myself wholly into Thy hands. And oh! what quiet and what comfort, what safety and what joy, there is in the assurance that I belong to Thee. What an honour and a happiness to be the possession of so good and gracious a Lord.

I am Thine, it is true, already by right of creation; I am Thine by my baptism; I am Thine by many other vows and promises, which I have freely made to Thee. I am obliged to be Thine by a thousand claims, and I delight in those bonds. I kiss the chains that tie me to Thee; make them now faster than ever.

All that I have, and all that I am, have I received from Thee. To

Thee do I render all again back. Take me wholly, my body, soul, and spirit; my words and my silence; my joys and my sorrows; my occupations and my times of quiet. Use me for Thyself, and for the glory of Thy Blessed Name. Claim me as Thy right, and dispose of me in all things according to Thy good pleasure.

It is but a poor gift that I present to Thee, but it is all I have to give, and all that Thou requirest. O that I had something better to offer Thee! O that I had the purity of an Angel, the understanding of the Cherubim, the love of a Seraph! all should be Thine, for Thou dost deserve all, yea, more than all I could give.

And now that I have made over myself into Thy Hands, let me never be so foolish as to rob Thee of that which I have given Thee, but grant me such supplies of grace that I may perform what I have

promised. Make me, O blessed God, faithful until death, that I may receive of Thee the crown of life. Keep me ever close to Thee on earth, that I may be very near to Thee in heaven.

CHAPTER III.

GOD'S PLAN.

GOD has a vocation for each one of us. We sometimes talk as if vocation were the privilege of a special few. This is a false mode of speech, a false thought. God cannot spare any one. He wants each single one for the carrying out of some part of His vast design. It is not merely the shapely stones that are necessary for a building, but those that are unshapely. The stones that are hidden from sight are just as needful for the compact firmness of the edifice as those that show in an honourable

place. But we like to appear ; we like to shine and to be conspicuous. Perhaps this is not our call. If we are unnoticed and lost to outward view, we are not lost to the eye of God. We still form part of His plan. He has a use for us, and we have each of us a true vocation.

Nothing happens by chance. As a cloud of dust flies along the road each particle is directed by the providence of God for a particular end. A portion of the dust is taken away in the garments of the traveller ; a portion enriches the vegetation of neighbouring fields ; a portion falls again to the ground, and is trodden under foot. And God directs each particle to its foreseen end in His own plan. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, says our Lord, without your Father. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. The lilies of the field are all under God's care. He clothes them ; and He it is that feeds the young ravens when

they call upon Him. And we, who are of so much more value than they, can He forget us? Are we not much more the objects of His loving careful solicitude? We are never lost sight of, not for a short moment even. God's attention is ever riveted on us every instant, as our pulses come and go. Our life hangs upon His providence for every breath we take.

When we look at a landscape, we see the whole of it vaguely. It is all reflected on the little mirror of our eye without perplexity or confusion. But we cannot see distinctly all that is there. For distinctness of vision we must concentrate our attention on a single spot. But God sees everything with distinctness, the small and the great, the past and the future, together with the present. He sees mankind, not only in mass, but each single individual. He beholds each one with fixed attention, and is intimately

mingled up with each most trivial action, and even with every change of thought. God's attention to one person does not distract Him from the care of another, but without weariness or perplexity He can manage a thousand worlds at the same time.

When God created the Angels, He brought them all into being in a moment. Instantaneously heaven was filled with bright beautiful spirits. But in the creation of mankind He acted otherwise. He made but one man and woman, from whom, in long process of time, in divers ages of the world, the human race should gradually spring. In Adam all the rest of men were contained, as the full grown oak tree is contained in the acorn. Yet each has also a separate vocation, a separate destiny. The perfection to which each one is called is not, as in the case of the Angels, given after one crucial trial, but is a gra-

dual formation under the Divine Hand. When we are born into this world, God has in His mind a certain premeditated perfection to which He designs we should reach. Just as an architect plans in his mind the building before he has even laid the foundation stone, or as a painter sketches in his imagination the picture he is about to form, before committing it to canvas, so it is with God in this matter ; and, on our entrance into this world, He but waits for our co-operation to carry into execution the plan that He has pre-conceived. On our side it is a life-long apprenticeship.

We come upon the stage of this world, bringing with us our body and soul, that is, ourselves. We come into the world one thing, but if we live long, we shall go out of it something very different. It may be for the better, it may be for the worse, but we shall not be what we were when we were born. Physi-

cians tell us that the body is in a continual state of flux, losing and gaining, but never the same. It is so also with the soul. The soul is ever changing, either for better or for worse.

Our body and soul are ourselves. In them are summed up our natural character and temperament, our leanings to vice and to virtue, our intellectual capacities and talents. These are the raw material for the forming of our future self. This raw material varies considerably in different persons. Some seem virtuously inclined by nature. Grace takes easy possession of them, and its amber halo plays already on their sweet infant faces. Others, on the contrary, come into the world wearing the brand of the inheritance of evil stamped on their brow. Such as are more nobly endowed, more richly graced, may fling off temptation, as Paul flung off the viper that clung to his hand into the fire, and

felt no hurt; whilst to the others the escape from sin is a fearful struggle, an agony of trial. To the one class the way of holiness is a terrible warfare, a rugged up-hill path; to the other, her ways are beautiful ways, and all her paths are peaceable. God has not given equal aptitudes for virtue to all, but all can be saved. The highest seats of sanctity are not bestowed upon all, but to all the gates of heaven are open.

Besides the inequalities of natural character and disposition, there are the no less important ones of early training and association. How happily circumstanced are some, nurtured in the bosom of pious families, where every lesson is comely and pure. In the race to heaven, the children of vagrants and thieves must surely be under terrible disadvantages, whose homes are homes of sin and vicious disorder, where the whole atmosphere breathes of corruption. It is as our Lord has

said: to one servant is given five talents, to another two, to another one. All do not receive equal advantages. But none receive so much, either in nature or grace, as to compel them to be good; none receive so little as not to be able to work out their salvation. The gate of heaven is open to all.

It is certain then that God wishes us to get to heaven; but what place, what throne in heaven is prepared for us, that we know not. Even a life of notable sin does not preclude the possibility of a call to the loftiest heights of sanctity. Witness such Saints as Saint Augustine, Saint John of Beverley, Saint Margaret of Cortona, and many others. Whatever place it may be that God has made us capable of attaining, we ought to wish to reach it. We ought to desire that very place that God intended for us when He brought us into the world, neither higher nor lower. We have deserved to lose

alas! speedily quenched in darkness.

We must not then be discouraged if we do not get on so fast as we could wish. The most valuable timber is not of rapid growth. Demosthenes, who became the most eloquent orator of ancient Greece, had to rid himself first, by years of labour, from his natural defects. It was a long and painful apprenticeship; but he succeeded in the end. In rowing up a stream the current is so strong in some spots that we can make but little way. When these places are passed, it is easier work. So is it in the spiritual life: but the very perseverance of efforts after good is a progress, because we are made firmer thereby in the habit of resisting evil. Thus not to go back is to go forward.

The entrance gate, however, into the road of perfection is the narrowest and most difficult part of

the road, especially when the first fervour is over. A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke frets under its burden at first, but by and by takes no notice of it. A new shoe, though made well to fit the foot, is not so easy to it as an old one, some time worn. We are creatures of habit, and to have to alter our mode of living and acting is never pleasant. Much less is it agreeable to adopt a stricter rule of life. But, after all, our worldly wants are for the most part artificial. Plain food with hunger is as appetizing as the greatest dainties. The taste itself, when less cloyed, becomes more delicate, and finds a savour where once none was perceived. Nature is content with little, and grace with less. In the virtues, also, the close-fisted man, having once opened the strings of his purse, finds the second opening less difficult, and so by degrees, from a niggard becomes liberal.

The passionate man, repressing bursts of anger, becomes gradually more meek. The chatterer, by guard of the tongue, becomes less fond of talking. And so of the rest. The way of asceticism and virtue is somewhat irksome at the outset, but it becomes, by new habit and by grace, comfortable and pleasant.

A true conversion of manners has *three* characteristic marks.

First, it is *habitual*. Relapses in part may more or less occur occasionally, and imperfections; but, to be sincere, conversion must form a new stable habit. One swallow does not make a summer. One extraordinary act of virtue does not make a Saint. To be sometimes sensual, at other times mortified; sometimes nice mannered, at other times disagreeable; is not a true conversion. True conversion is, at least in the main, permanent, abiding, habitual.

The *second* mark of a true conversion is that it is *universal*. If not so at once, it at least tends thitherward. It takes in the whole cycle of virtues; advancing ever onward from virtue to virtue it goes, heaping up more wealth, adding field to field, never content. Alexander, when he had conquered the whole world, wept because there was no more to conquer. It is not so with the soul. There are always fresh countries, which God opens her eyes to behold, undiscovered continents, new worlds, which He invites her to bring under her dominion. No peace or league is to be made with any of the old inhabitants of the land. The war is one of utter extermination. The extirmination is, however, to be gradual. In the Promised Land, till the time of David, Jebus still held the stronghold in Jerusalem. David cast him out. But to be stably good in some

points, and stably bad in others, is not a true conversion of manners. To be good at fasting, but not good at prayer; to be good at silence, but bad at obliging others; to be good at labour, but not prompt in obedience; is not true conversion. Sweet water and bitter should not come from the one fountain, good fruit and corrupt fruit from the same tree. These are flaws in the jewel, and, like coarse dark threads, ruin the beauty of the fabric.

These two first signs may suffice for ordinary conversions. Some persons set before themselves a moderate standard of virtue, and go higher they will not. They are quite content. They do not will any absolute perfection, and they are determined not to be driven. Truth is, they can neither be led nor driven. A change, if change there ever comes, must be within and from God. These imperfect

souls are to be borne with, and not pushed unwillingly up the heights.

The *third* sign of entire conversion is a *gracefulness* in virtuous acts. Beginners in virtue do what is good, but awkwardly and stiffly. They walk, but they walk on stilts, in an ungainly manner. This mode is sometimes also the result of a rigid character, or of the teaching of rigid books. A piece of music, when played by an unskilful hand, though the correct notes are given, and in correct time, yet it is but a cold dead thing. But in the hands of a true musician, how it changes its face. How it thrills us by its grandeurs, how it melts us by its plaint. We are transported out of ourselves; we go we know not whither, captivated by its charm. When such a musician takes his harp, and sweeps with his hand over the chords, he at once and without effort fills the air with the most delicious enrapturing sounds. So

is it with the Saints and saintly persons in their acts of virtue; they are done with such a sweet ease, with so charming a gracefulness, with such exquisite propriety, as quite to silence the tongues of fault-finders. When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his foes to be at peace with him. The perfection of virtue in saintly souls casts its spell outside, and by the beauty of its holiness enthralls the heart, filling it with admiration.

However, even great saints have some defects or strong violent temptations. Some wondered why Saint Gertrude was so dear to our Lord, seeing she had certain palpable defects of temper. God suffers these things for the good of humility, that out of an evil root He may bring a most sweet flower. Tauler says that God rarely raises souls to a high degree of favour but after some previous fall. S. Paul, when lifted up to the third

heaven, had a thorn in the flesh, to buffet him and keep him humble. In nature we see the same. The peacock has beautiful plumage, but a hideous voice. The swan has the whitest of feathers, but a black skin. These occasional defects should humble but not discourage us. Our garden is naturally a desert heath, and God leaves in it a patch of ground uncultivated yet, to show us what the rest would be like but for His grace.

If, however, the two first characteristic marks of true conversion are lacking to us, we may feel sure that something is amiss. When a tree is rich in plentiful blossom, yet scarce here and there any fruit abides on it, then let the gardener take it up and examine the roots. He will pretty certainly find that the strongest roots strike down into a bad barren soil. These strong roots must either be cut off, or their direction so turned that

they no longer penetrate to draw sap from that corrupting ground. The soul that has good desires, and not the fruit of true conversion, has its strongest roots still fast in worldly things, or in self-willed, self-chosen ways. Never will she bring forth fruit in holiness till these roots be cut off or their direction turned.

CHAPTER V.

DISCRETION.

DISCRETION is called by S. Benedict the mother of virtues. "Without discretion," says S. Bernard, "virtue is vice." How precious, then, is this grace of discretion. Those who have it not in themselves should, as the best make-shift, place themselves wholly in the hands of a discreet guide. But as this will but very feebly

supply its want, they should also earnestly cultivate this prudential virtue, and beg it supplicatingly of God. Discretion has to do with every virtue, and with every portion of a holy life.

Discretion is the guide to the true interpretation of the maxims of spiritual books, the letter of which sometimes killeth, but the spirit giveth life. Our Lord in the Gospel says that if any one strike us on the one cheek we are to turn to him the other, and that we are not to resist evil. Yet when He Himself was so struck, far from turning the other cheek, He remonstrated against the evil inflicted. Our Lord says, "Swear not at all." Yet we find S. Paul, His perfect disciple, in various places in his Epistles, swearing to the truth of what he says, in words such as these: "Behold, before God I lie not." Our Lord does not contradict His own words by His actions ;

nor does the disciple contradict his Master; but the maxims laid down are to be interpreted with discretion. Maxims that are full of truth for scrupulous minds, are utterly false for loose livers. And again, what is true and wholesome for easy goers would be very untruthfully applied to timorous souls. "What is one man's food is another man's poison." Discretion it is which discerns what is fitting for each one.

The Saints were all guided by the Spirit of God, yet in what different ways! For instance, S. Francis being in very great pain, one of the Brothers said to him, "Father, why not ask our Lord to relieve you a little of your sufferings?" S. Francis replied: "O Brother, what do you say?" Then, rising in an extasy from his bed, he threw himself on the ground and cried out, "O my Lord, I not only do not ask Thee to relieve my

suffering, but I beg Thee, if it please Thee, to increase it a hundred fold." But S. Bernard being once in great anguish, asked two of the Brethren to go into the Church and pray God to give him a little relief. They had scarcely gone when our Lady entered the cell with S. Benedict and S. Lawrence, to whom the side altars were dedicated. Our Lady touched him in the parts afflicted with pain, and he was instantly cured. S. Bridget also, being subject to a bad headache, was cured by S. Aidus at her own request.

S. Bruno kept women so at a distance that he never, on any pretext, allowed them to come near him. But S. John the Divine, appearing in a vision to S. Gertrude, said to her: "I never avoided women when I could be of any service to them, either for their souls or bodies." S. Teresa, when she heard the clock strike, used to

congratulate herself that she had an hour less to live. But to S. Mechtilde it was revealed that those are most happy who are still alive, and that they ought to be full of joy when another day shines on them in which, by the grace of God, they may live to Him and increase their merit. All, therefore, must not be driven one road, but each should march in the freedom of the inspiration of God's Spirit.

That which is good in itself is not advisable in all circumstances. Recreation is good, but it is not discreet for Religious to recreate themselves too freely when people of the world are present. "How those Nuns did chatter," says one. "How silly was their talk. How I hate those giggling Nuns." S. Basil says "that men of the world should not be invited into the Monk's Refectory. These men," he says, "think Monks are Angels, and ought to live upon air. And when

after a long fast they see them eat and drink with an appetite, they think it dreadful gluttony." It happened in a Convent that the children had a tea-party, and some of the Nuns ate with the children, when one little girl was overheard to whisper to her companions, "I didn't know that Nuns liked cake." She had discovered that Nuns were not Angels. S. Thomas of Villanova, through discretion, would never eat in the presence of women. People of the world sometimes persuade Religious to eat and drink, and then they talk of it behind their backs to their great discredit.

There are some people who, on principle, never give a word of praise. Praise they look on as flattery, likely to puff a person up, likely to lead to vanity. This is bad discretion. How differently did Saint Paul act. His Epistles are full of praise, full of compli-

ments, we might say. Where praise is just it is generally advisable to give it. Many distrust themselves. It is by seeing their efforts successful and approved of, that they are encouraged in their labours, and persevere in good.

In matters of obedience discretion is of great moment. The obedience of some people is like that of a stick. Take a stick in your hand, walk with it, or put it in a corner, or remove it to another corner, or hang it up on a peg, and in all circumstances it obeys exactly. Some people aim at the obedience of a stick as the very perfection of obedience. But the true perfection of obedience is that of a child, not the obedience of a stick. A child, when ordered to do something, may reveal a circumstance to the person commanding which causes an instant counter-order of the thing enjoined. Had the circumstance been known be-

fore, or been remembered, the order would never have been issued at all.

A Superior might order one in health to do a thing which he would never order one whom he knew to be sick. Then, to hide the circumstance of sickness, or any other like circumstance, would make the obedience into disobedience,—disobedience, not to the letter of the command, but to the mind and intention of the person commanding. For, if he but knew the circumstances well, he would at once give a counter command. This disobedience to the mind of the Superior is not actually sinful when the folly proceeds from a natural defect of discretion, and not of secret malice. It is, however, a great imperfection, disclosing the want of a simple child-like spirit, sourness of character, and secret self-will and vanity.

Discretion also is greatly needed

in the virtue of truthfulness. Some persons think it only honest to blurt out sentiments that are disagreeable to others. They esteem a prudent silence to be a mean hypocrisy. So they show their dislikes and aversions from a false idea of being sincere and straightforward. Worldly people cloak their sentiments and feelings through a politic dissimulation; but religious people rise above them by a high and heavenly tact, through holy charity.

Discretion is needed in the embracing of crosses. Some people take it as a maxim that whatever is disagreeable is the best, spiritually speaking. This is a delusion. When Mary was sitting at our Lord's feet it would have been very disagreeable to her to have had to get up and help her sister in the household work. It certainly seemed very selfish of her to let her sister bear all the burden,

whilst she was enjoying herself, listening to our Lord's words. Martha wished to give the cross to her sister, but our Lord said, No. Mary would have lost perfection by this act of charity. She had not a call from God to it. For her the best part was to sit quiet at our Lord's feet. It was best and most agreeable. Only those crosses sanctify which our Lord lays upon us. To take up crosses at random, or through self-will, is not the road to perfection. Discretion tells us when, where, and how to handle a cross; which crosses to leave and which to take up.

Even virtuous actions may be considerably spoiled by want of discretion in the way of doing them. Some do them just as people walk on stilts, in a stiff ungainly manner, so as to rob virtue of its grace, and make it appear hateful and detestable. Piety suffers much from such apprentices. They may be

respected for their intentions; but they are very unlovely and unloveable. Discretion teaches how graciously to bend a bit to circumstances, and still retain the substance of virtue, waiving occasionally for a while what is not of essential obligation, or changing one good action for another. So virtue is both respected and loved, is graceful and amiable.

CHAPTER VI.

GOD'S FIDELITY TO HIS PROMISES.

THERE is nothing so reliable as God's word. "As we have heard, so we have seen," is the exclamation of David on beholding how completely the promises of God were performed. The like sentiment Solomon breathes when he says of God : "There hath not failed so much as one word of all

God's Fidelity to His Promises. 61

the good things that He promised." God's word is, as David says, "like silver tried in the fire, purged from the earth, refined seven times." There is no dross in God's word, it is all pure truth.

But there are certain seasons when God's truthfulness to His promises shines out before the soul in a most clear manner; and it is then she is constrained to cry out with the Psalmist: "As we have heard, so have we seen." One of these periods is that of conversion. By conversion is meant the change from a worldly or a wicked life, to a life of interior piety, when not only bad habits are put away, but the heart becomes radically new.

1. When God calls to conversion the soul does not generally absolutely refuse, but she lingers; just as when Lot was told to go out of Sodom he lingered. And, as he lingered, the Angels took

hold of his hands, and drew him out. So the soul lingers. She cannot bear the idea of parting with her old carnal pleasures, and her worldly toys. She is told of the light yoke of the Lord, and of that service which is perfect freedom; and hearing, she feels to long after a new and better life. Still the old looks pleasant, and the new cheerless to her eyes yet blind and carnal. But how to give herself to God? How to break from the degrading bonds, the toys which give no contentment? Divine grace alone can complete this work, lending to the will that resolute firmness which it in vain of itself essays to arrive at. Then quickly are the chains of our sins broken, and an immense gladness takes possession of the heart.

Then it is that the soul is led to exclaim: "As we have heard, so we have seen." For all that she had been told of the "peace that

God's Fidelity to His Promises. 63

passeth all understanding," the "joy unspeakable and glorious," the "refreshment and rest" given by Christ to the heavy laden; these things she knows now, not by the report of others, but she feels and tastes them. She is amazed at her former blindness, her dulness, and insensibility. And as for those base joys of the flesh and of the world, she now quite detests them. "O how sweet," says Saint Augustine, "was it of a sudden become to me not to have the sweets of those toys. What I had feared to lose I now cast gladly from me. For Thou didst drive them forth, Thou who art the true and Sovereign sweetness. Thou didst expel them, and instead didst Thyself enter in, sweeter than all pleasure, brighter than any light, more secret than any hidden thing."

2. God's fidelity to His promises is also put to a severe test in the

embracing of the Religious life. To go into a Convent is a daring experiment. What a wrench it is by which we are parted from home and family, from our wonted occupations and loved pursuits. Then the life itself which is embraced seems full of hardships, and so barren of natural delights. This is not the case merely with the very austere Orders, but with those, too, where the body has not such rough treatment. Then there is the Religious discipline, the obedience, the silence, the having nothing of one's own. Altogether, it requires no small courage to adventure oneself into this strange country. When people enter a Convent, they look for, not a safe road to heaven only, but also a greater happiness on earth. They want to have both worlds, the present and that which is to come. And they are not disappointed. God has promised this, and He is not slack in fulfil-

God's Fidelity to His Promises. 65

ing His word. Worldlings have no idea of this. In the Religious life they only see the thorns. They do not see the lily that grows amongst the thorns. They do not smell its delicious scent, or at least but at a distance. Then they say : " Oh, you have a hard life, but you will get your reward one day." They think that on this side the grave the Religious life is a dreadful weighty cross, a very misery, but that Religious bear with it for the sake of eternity.

They are, however, much mistaken. The Religious life is not the burdensome task they imagine it to be. For, after all, what are its hardships? Nature is content with little, and grace with less. Plain coarse food relishes quite as well, after a while, as the most delicate dainties. One can sleep with quite as much comfort on a hard bed as on a soft one. In short, a simple, austere life is in itself quite

as pleasant as a life of artificial worldly comfort. No doubt at first the giving up of these things costs, till a new habit is established.

Home and friends and independence are at all times a real sacrifice; but then, our Lord makes rich compensation for all that is lost on His account. He would be false to His word if He did not. For He has said: "There is no man, who hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake, and for the gospel, who shall not receive an hundred times as much in this present time." There is no waiting for eternity. It is promised that in the present life he shall receive a hundred times as much joy, happiness, and contentment, as those things would have given him which, for Christ's sake, he has forsaken. Godliness, as the Apostle says, has the promise of the life that now is, and of

God's Fidelity to His Promises. 67

that which is to come. So that the faithful Religious may say: "As we have heard, so have we seen. I had been told that Religious were excessively happy. I now find, by my own experience, that this is perfectly true."

3. There is, however, in this perishing life no complete happiness. The wine, on this earth, is ever mingled with gall. Perfect happiness is reserved for heaven. There we shall not be disappointed of our hope. We shall be able to say: "As we have heard, so have we seen." But if this be so, why is it that so few, even of the good, like to die? Apart from the fear of the judgment, or of purgatorial pains, good men fear to die.

It is because death ushers us into an unknown world,—a world for which we have no measure. We know what this world is like. This world has its sorrows, but it has its joys. We have round us

dear familiar faces, and we think, Doth bitter death thus separate? We have our interesting plans, our pursuits, and pleasures. Altogether life is not so unlovely, but that, with Ezechias, we could do with a few more years.

Still, we have heard of heaven, of the fulness of joy at God's right Hand. Why then linger below? Surely, to have heaven instead of earth were a happy exchange. We allow it, yet linger still. We should like to have palpable possession of heaven before losing our hold on earth. Doubtless no one that is in full possession of heaven ever wishes to re-enter this vale of tears. But till we can get a firm hold of that which we shall love more, we naturally cling to that which we have, though the love of it be less.

Once in possession, we shall have no regrets. Ample amends will be made for all we lose.

God's Fidelity to His Promises. 69

Streams of bliss unutterable will to the full satisfy our hearts. For then we shall have, not those tiny rills of joy that are allowed us during our banishment, but in overwhelming billows will our God pour upon us all the treasures of His magnificence. Even the hearing of these things, what a comfort, what a strength, what a refreshment it is! But then it will no longer only be the hearing of the ear, for our eye shall see them.

Then, in uncontrollable gladness shall we cry : " As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God : God hath established her for ever."

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